

Chapter 18

“I’ll point you to a better time/A safer place to be”: Music, Nostalgia and Estrangement in *Twin Peaks: The Return*

David Sweeney

In her review of the first two episodes of *Twin Peaks: The Return* (*The Return* hereafter) for *Variety* Sonia Saraiya criticises the “inexplicably stupid” closing scene in which “the indie-electronic band Chromatics performs to a room of middle-aged townies taking tequila shots”¹. Leaving aside the class contempt, ageism and regional snobbery evident here, Saraiya also demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of the aesthetic of the series: Chromatics' music is strongly influenced by 1980s synthpop – most notably New Order and Giorgio Moroder – and as such its inclusion in the show is consistent with the use of similarly ‘retro’ music in the original series – usually referencing the 1950s – and throughout Lynch's *oeuvre*.

Furthermore, Chromatics' presence, and that of the other acts performing at the Bang Bang Bar – a mixture of fifties and eighties influenced musicians – makes perfect extra-diegetic sense in the context of what music critic Simon Reynolds has termed “retromania”: pop culture's fascination with, and constant referencing of, its past. The late cultural critic Mark Fisher developed Reynolds' concept in his 2014 book *Ghosts of My Life* with his analysis of the “classic style” of twenty-first century artists such as Amy Winehouse and Adele, whose music “belong[s] neither to the present or the past, but to some timeless era, an eternal 1960s or an eternal 80s”.² For Fisher such music is an indication of cultural stasis and a lack of innovation (one theme of the book is, as its subtitle indicates, “lost futures”); however, in the context of *Twin Peaks* “retro” music – which in some cases, like the Cactus Blossoms (episode 3) or Rebekah Del Rio (episode 10), is such a perfect pastiche of its sources as to seem to belong authentically to the past – also functions as an element of estrangement. *Twin Peaks* is set in a world recognisably similar to our own but noticeably, strangely, different.

In this sense, the addition of the definite article to the band Nine Inch Nails' name when they are introduced at the Roadhouse in episode 8, and also in its closing credits with the definite article in quotation marks, serves as an example of *divergence* from the actual world: this is not 'our' Nine Inch Nails but an alternative version. Similarly, the evocation of the pop cultural past in *The Return* may seem more realistic today than perhaps it did in the 1990s of the original series' broadcast given how digital technology, particularly the internet, has created a kind of 'archive culture', but it also works as another indicator of difference: Twin Peaks, both the series and the town, is not quite a pocket universe, but it does seem to exist in some kind of temporal aesthetic bubble (which is generally true of Lynch's work and his fondness for anachronisms: when exactly, for example, are *Blue Velvet* or *Mulholland Drive* set?). This chapter will discuss how the 'retro' music of the various acts performing at the Bang Bang Bar/Roadhouse contributes both to the sense of nostalgia surrounding *The Return* epitextually and to the themes of memory and loss present in the series. In doing so it will draw on the work of Reynolds and Fisher to argue that Saraiya's sarcastic comment “nothing says rural, small-town, faded glory like an impossibly cool synthpop band”³ is actually true in the (e)strange(d) world of *Twin Peaks*.

Of the musical acts which contributed to *The Return* Chromatics (episodes 2, 12 and 17, with Julee Cruise) and Au Revoir Simone (episodes 4 and 9) can be described as synthpop acts, a sub-genre of electronic music. Nine Inch Nails, an 'Industrial' group also make electronic music, although this seems less true of “The” Nine Inch Nails from episode 8 who sound, and look, like sixties rock band The Velvet Underground. Sonically, “The” Nine Inch Nails are closer to other rock acts in the series such as Trouble (episode 5) and The Veils (episode 15), although these bands reference the fifties rather than the sixties. Hudson Mohawke provides perhaps the most modern music in the series with his performance of the instrumental 'Human' in episode 9 which eschews any conventional instrumentation or traditional song structure (unlike Chromatics or Au Revoir Simone). By contrast Cactus Blossoms (episode 3); Sharon Van Etten (episode 6); Rebekah Del Rio (episode 10); Lissie

(episode 14) and Eddie Vedder (episode 16) all perform songs with conventional instruments which are firmly rooted in the established traditions of mid-late twentieth century Western songcraft.

Given *The Return*'s thematic concerns with time, memory and nostalgia it is perhaps more useful to classify the performers at the Bang Bang Bar by which era they evoke rather than by which (sub)genre they belong to. Both Chromatics and Au Revoir Simone point directly to the 1980s; Cactus Blossoms, Del Rio, Trouble and The Veils to the 1950s; *The Nine Inch Nails* to the 1960s. Lissie, Van Etten and Vedder are less specific in their period borrowings, belonging instead to a tradition of 'classic' songwriting: Van Etten's 'Tarifa' even goes so far as to quote musically from Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' (1984), as popularised by Jeff Buckley (1994; released as single in 2007), in its introduction. Following Buckley's tragic early death at the age of 30 in 1997, and his subsequent posthumous elevation to the status of rock icon/martyr, 'Hallelujah' has become something of a standard for singers keen to demonstrate both their virtuosity and their authenticity. Julee Cruise's collaboration with Chromatics on a version of 'The World Spins' (episode 17) refers back, of course, to the original series of *Twin Peaks* and therefore to the 1990s, although the song itself is influenced by fifties pop ballads. Hudson Mohake's performance points only to itself, as a product of the twenty-first century.

As stated above, Cactus Blossoms and Del Rio deliver songs which are such perfect pastiches of their sources – respectively, fifties country pop à la the Everley Brothers, and torch song in the vein of Patsy Cline, albeit with some lyrics in Spanish – as to be indistinguishable from them. Or almost indistinguishable, at least: as Fisher has pointed out, modern production techniques give such pastiche a “buffed up” sound (11). The same is true of Chris Isaak's song 'Wicked Game', included on the soundtrack to Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990) and 'Rockin' Back Inside My Heart' by Julee Cruise (1989), co-written by Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti. Simon Reynolds has described the former as “a highly stylised retro-chic affair, like a fifties ballad sluiced through the deluxe atmospherics of Roxy Music circa [their 1982 album] *Avalon*”⁴; hearing it on the radio in 1990 it was easy to assume it was a re-issue of fifties recording. This was not uncommon in the eighties and

early nineties: TV adverts for Levi jeans, for example, spawned the re-release of several 'classic' soul and rock songs such as Marvin Gaye's 'Heard It Through the Grapevine' (1968; 1985) and 'Should I Stay or Should I Go' by The Clash (1981; 1991). However, Cruise's performance of 'Rockin' Back Inside My Heart' on a 1989 episode of BBC2's culture magazine programme *The Late Show*, came with a comprehensive introduction by host Sarah Dunant which made it clear that this was a new song, and not a cover version.

Cruise's performance was, and remains, eerie. Dressed in black, pale and frail beneath a platinum blonde bouffant, her voice yearning and pure if slightly out of tune, accompanied by a group which included two back-up singers in white fifties taffeta prom dresses and a duo of sharp-suited saxophonists, all of whom clicked their fingers and swayed in time to the music, albeit with a certain listlessness, Cruise appeared otherworldly on *The Late Show*. And in a way, she was: as Dunant stated in her introduction, Cruise was to appear in Lynch's "much anticipated TV pilot *Twin Peaks*"; the singer and her band appeared to be envoys from the world of the series more than simply musicians promoting an album. The song's lyrics further invoked this world, with their intriguing references to a shadowy, brown-eyed man and a woman destined never to go to Hollywood, phrases which subverted the otherwise conventionally romantic content of the song, just as *Twin Peaks* would subvert the conventions of the soap opera form.

Twin Peaks, like Lynch's 1986 film *Blue Velvet*, drew on fifties Americana in its music and set and costume design, but crucially neither film nor series is actually set in that decade, nor is the deployment of fifties signifiers presented as an exercise in retro-chic or even nostalgia by the characters in the show (as Greil Marcus once wryly observed, Laura Palmer's outfits "suggested that the Twin Peaks department store hadn't reordered since 1959"⁵). Rather, this is what the world of *Twin Peaks* the series - and Twin Peaks, the town - is like. "From the eighties on," Reynolds writes, 'rock 'n' roll recurred only as a ghostly signifier detached from any real world referents"⁶, but in both *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*, the prominence of a fifties inspired aesthetic makes their worlds both recognisable but unfamiliar to the viewer. It is this estrangement which makes both series and film

so compelling (and admittedly, in the case of *Twin Peaks*, at times irritating).

Lynch has described the twenty-first century pop star Lana Del Rey as being 'like she's born out of another time'.⁷ Del Rey covered the song 'Blue Velvet' – the 1963 Bobby Vinton version of which features in the opening scene of Lynch's film and, when re-issued in 1990, became a UK number 2 hit single - as part of Swedish clothes' retailer H&M's 2012 global advertising campaign for which she was the face. However, we might say Del Rey appears to be “born out” of another world, a Lynchian one. Del Rey would fit right into *Twin Peaks* or the Lumberton, North Carolina, of *Blue Velvet*. Her carefully crafted, fifties influenced image and sound might appear anachronistic in the actual world but would be unremarkable in a Lynchian one. Nevertheless, Del Rey does not have quite the same otherworldliness as Cruise, largely because of the cultural impact made by the original series of *Twin Peaks* and the subsequent recognisability, and easy reproducibility, at least on a superficial level, of a Lynchian style.

This is evident in Del Rey's version of 'Blue Velvet', the video for which features Patrick Fischler who appeared in both *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *The Return*. Her rendition applies some modern, Dub reggae-derived echo to its instrumentation but apart from this the arrangement is fairly traditional, albeit with a twenty-first century “buffed up” sheen. The arrangements on *Floating into the Night*, Cruise's debut album (1989), written and produced by Lynch and Badalamenti, on the other hand, warp the fifties sources – doo wop, torch song - on which the album is based. Even the relatively traditional 'Rockin' Back Inside My Heart' has an element of sonic subversion – to complement the lyrical one mentioned above – in the disruptive saxophone break beginning at around 1.44, which punctures the song's eerie, dolorous tranquility. Synthesizers dominate the instrumentation throughout the album, with 'Falling', the instrumental version of which is the theme music to *Twin Peaks*, and 'The World Spins' featuring percussive synthesized bass-lines oddly similar in timbre to those by eighties pop music producers such as Trevor Horn and Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis. Echo is also prevalent - again recalling the techniques of Dub, but with a more destabilising, estranging effect than Del Rey's superficial use on her version of “Blue Velvet” – used

to make Cruise sound isolated, vulnerable and incorporeal, as befitting the lyrical content of the record and the thematic content of *Twin Peaks*, which is, after all, an investigation into the murder of a teenage girl which engages with the supernatural.

The music of Au Revoir Simone and, particularly Chromatics, has clearly been influenced by *Floating Into the Night* (Chromatics' vocalist Ruth Radelet even wears a platinum blonde wig in *The Return*, possibly in tribute to/imitation of Cruise). And Chromatics' performance of 'The World Turns' with Cruise in the penultimate episode of *The Return* provides a certain sense of closure to the series before the disruptive coda of the final episode in which Agent Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) and his secretary Diane (Laura Dern) travel to a parallel earth. Various critics have described the music of both groups, and of Cruise, as "'Dream Pop' and this seems a particularly appropriate sub-genre to be associated with Lynch, giving the preoccupation with the oneiric throughout his *oeuvre* in general, and *Twin Peaks* in particular. Dream Pop's roots lie in the music of eighties British post-punk and New Wave acts such as New Order and the Cocteau Twins. The influence of the former is evident in both Chromatics and Au Revoir Simone, with 'Shadow', performed by the former in the first episode of *The Return* recreating the sound of New Order's second album *Power, Corruption and Lies* (1983) and the latter's two contributions recalling their mid-late eighties singles. Chromatics also demonstrate a certain debt to the Cocteau Twins' ethereal sound in the arrangement of the instrumental 'Saturday' (episode 12). Lynch had planned to use the 1984 version of Tim (father of Jeff) Buckley's 'Song to the Siren' (1970) by This Mortal Coil, sung by Cocteau Twins vocalist Elizabeth Fraser, in *Blue Velvet*. He substituted Cruise's 'Mysteries of Love' when he was unable to secure the rights (and would eventually use the song in 1997's *Lost Highway*). Dream Pop, then, is a genre which originated in the 1980s and has persisted into the present where it is both retro and of the moment. Or rather, it is of the moment because it is retro: both Chromatics and Au are the kind of group played on the Domino Records on the internet radio station East Village Radio (2009-2014)⁸, which featured classic acts such as the Velvet Underground, New Order and the Cocteau Twins alongside bands they had influenced, to create a kind of lineage of good taste,

curated by the staff from the titular record label which releases such 'retro' but à la mode music.

Chromatics are popular enough to pull a sizeable crowd at the Bang Bang Bar, as are all the other acts who perform in *The Return*. So, we can imagine a regular patron hearing synthpop one night, heavy rock another, exquisite country pastiche yet another and so on. In the world of *Twin Peaks*, these sub-genres co-exist comfortably, and unremarkably, both together, and also alongside the fifties aesthetic favoured by Lynch. We can understand this situation using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope', which refers to the relationship between time and space in fiction. There is nothing anachronistic about the fifties aesthetic which pervades *Twin Peaks* for the people who inhabit that world; Agent Dale Cooper is charmed by the town when he arrives there but we do not get the sense that he considers it to be “weird” (the eccentricities of characters like the Log Lady notwithstanding). And Cooper himself has something of a fifties aesthetic in his clean cut appearance and courteous manner. He shares space and time with the citizens of Twin Peaks, both in the town specifically, and, more broadly, in the world of which it is a part and so what might appear anomalous to the viewer is not necessarily so for him. Saraiya's error in her review of the first episode of *The Return* is to read for realism, an odd approach for anyone to take to Lynch's work, particularly a *Variety* journalist with such a condescending attitude towards “townies”. It may be the case that, in the actual world, Chromatics would not receive as warm a reception in a non-urban venue as they do in the series but then *Twin Peaks* is set in a fictional world, which Lynch, and series co-creator Mark Frost have *imagined* into being. Of course, the use of fifties signifiers in *Twin Peaks*, as in *Blue Velvet*, serves a purpose beyond indulging Lynch's affection for that era: by deploying fifties iconography, Lynch and Frost are able to expose the hypocrisy of the white, suburban American dream and reveal the corruption beneath its pristine surface, just as the lyrics of ‘Rockin' Back Inside My Heart’ taint its veneer of pop perfection.

The xx are another twenty-first century Dream Pop band, active since 2005, whose 2010 track ‘Infinity’ is, as Reynolds writes, “blatantly related” to ‘Wicked Game’:

[I]t really is a study, an exercise in technique, in the sense that the band have written

a new song entirely within the very specific and immediately recognisable texture palette and emotional atmosphere of Isaak's original.⁹

Reynolds acknowledges the irony that 'Wicked Game' was itself a pastiche; the same does not apply to the New Order album which influenced Chromatics: on its original release *Power, Corruption and Lies* was innovative in its combination of electronics and conventional rock instrumentation. Which is not to diminish the appeal of 'Wicked Game': it remains a highly affective song perhaps because of its status as pastiche which gives a certain 'timeless' gravitas. The xx, all born in the 1980s, would have been too young to remember the song on its initial release so their choice of it as the model for 'Infinity' is testament to its durability. And of course as a recording 'Wicked Game' has a lifespan far beyond its time on the charts, and as both a classic and a prominent element in *Wild At Heart* the song has become a staple of pop culture. Romy Madley Croft, the bands guitarist and co-vocalist, has cited a number of performers – such as Jimi Hendrix, The Slits and the Cocteau Twins - who were active before she was born as influences; as such her tastes – like those of the acts, and audience, at the Bang Bang Bar - are typical of what we might call our 'archive culture'.

Apart from Cruise, only one other Bang Bang Bar act was active in the nineties: Eddie Vedder, as lead singer of the 'grunge' band Pearl Jam (1990 -). Vedder is an icon of nineties popular culture, particularly as the singers from the other key grunge bands had all passed away before *The Return* aired: Kurt Cobain from Nirvana (d.1994); Layne Staley from Alice in Chains (d.2002); Scott Welland (d.2015); Chris Cornell of Soundgarden (d.2017; Cornell died on May 18th, three days before the first episode of *The Return* was broadcast). Vedder's presence in episode 16, then, was not only iconic but totemic: as the last surviving vocalist from grunge's "Big 5" he embodies a period of (pop) cultural change when alternative music entered the mainstream, which is of course comparable to the way in which *Twin Peaks* transformed television, paving the way for such notable series as *The X-Files* (1993-), *Lost* (2004-2010) and *True Detective* (2014-). There is also a poignancy to Vedder's presence because he represents perhaps the last time such a transformation of

mainstream pop culture was possible. As with punk and the Sex Pistols in the seventies, the success of Nirvana's *Nevermind* in 1991 led to a feeding frenzy in the music industry as major record labels sought to capitalise on the novelty/notoriety of the band by signing dozens of new and established 'underground' acts. And as with punk, grunge quickly became a style, reduced to a set of easily recognisable, and reproducible, sonic and sartorial signifiers: down-tuned guitars; 'grainy' vocals; plaid shirts; Converse tennis shoes. To borrow terms from the Situationists, both grunge and punk were recuperated by the music industry: their 'edgy' and 'alternative' elements commodified, made into marketable characteristics¹.

As early nineties phenomena, both grunge and *Twin Peaks* emerged at what the American neo-conservative economist Francis Fukuyama called the "end of history". This is the phrase used by Fukuyama in his book of the same name (1992) to describe the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989-1990) and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in Eastern and Northern Europe and the end of the Cold War in the early nineties. The demise of the Soviet Union saw democracy spread throughout its former territories and with it, free market capitalism: in other words, the rise of neoliberalism. For Fukuyama, this suggested that Western capitalism was the ultimate economic, social and governmental model for humanity: therefore, history had ended in the sense that human sociocultural evolution was over. Mark Fisher discusses the emergence of 'capitalist realism' beginning in this period, using the phrase as the title of his first book (2009). For Fisher, capitalist realism is a "pervasive atmosphere"¹⁰ in Western culture based on the belief that there is no alternative to capitalism, which has the result of "conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action"¹¹. Under such hegemonic conditions all things become equal as commodities, even if they are marketed as alternative. Kurt Cobain seemed, on some level, to be aware of this – after releasing their debut album on the independent label Sub Pop Nirvana signed to the major DGC - and struggled with the contradictions of his fame and his desire, borne from his background in the American punk rock underground, for integrity and authenticity. By contrast,

Vedder and Pearl Jam seemed to have no such issues over becoming rock stars. But despite these factors, perhaps the early nineties does still have the air of a ‘golden age’ of popular culture, not only because of grunge and *Twin Peaks* but also due to other factors such as the hip hop of this period (which is often referred to as ‘Golden Age’ hip hop); the rise of American independent cinema and directors such as Spike Lee, Quentin Tarantino, and Kevin Smith; Acid House and ‘Madchester’ in the UK. Maybe it is understood retrospectively as a period of innocence before the full effects of neoliberalism would become apparent with the events of September 11th 2001, the subsequent invasion of and endless war in Afghanistan, and the financial crash of 2008. Perhaps it is seen as a time when, for all it was the end of history, there was still a future.

The subtitle to Fisher's second book, *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), makes reference to “lost futures”. For Fisher, twenty-first century Western culture is characterised by a sense of stasis which ‘has been buried, interred behind a superficial frenzy of ‘newness’, of perpetual movement’¹². Furthermore, Fisher identifies a “vague but persistent feeling of the past”¹³ as being prevalent today, particularly in pop music. But this residue of the past in the present is not necessarily nostalgic: rather, it seems to be the result of a sense that everything – including every time - is available; an inevitable consequence of living in an archive culture. Certainly, this relationship to the past is not nostalgic in Walter Benjamin's sense of a remembering which stimulates a challenge the status quo in the present in order to shape the future. Rather it is a mentality in which “the past is looked to as both a *resource* for contemporary production, and as a *compensation* for ‘lost futures’”ⁱⁱ. This situation is an example of what Douglas Rushkoff terms “presentism”: a perpetual now in which “[e]verything is live, real time, and always-on”¹⁴. This is a result, he argues, of our present ‘connected’ society, so perhaps nostalgia for the nineties is also for a pre-internet era, one without the present-day pressures of connectivity.

The lyrics of ‘Out of Sand’ the song Vedder – introduced as Edward Louis Severson III, his birth name - performs in episode 16 have an elegiac feel to them, a sense of loss and fatigue, in keeping with the tone of much of *The Return*, several episodes of which ended with an *in memoriam*

dedication to members of the cast who had passed away. He sings them to the sole accompaniment of his acoustic guitar in an ‘unplugged’ rendition which recalls the MTV show of that name (1989-1999) which was, as Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor have observed, “conceived as a response to the public perception that the contemporary music scene was obsessed with image rather than content”¹⁵ and in which several grunge bands, including Nirvana and Pearl Jam, demonstrated their aptitude, and authenticity, as musicians by performing acoustic versions of their songs. Vedder's performance can be interpreted as an elegy for youth, for optimism, for futurity. But his status as a survivor means that if his presence is an exercise in nostalgia it is not a comforting one, which is in keeping with the strategy of estrangement taken by Lynch and Frost throughout *The Return* to problematise the audience's relationship with the text.

This strategy is also evident in an initially trivial seeming error in episode 8. Having the MC of the Bang Bang Bar introduce Nine Inch Nails in the episode with the definite article may simply be a joke by Frost and Lynch at the expense of his folksy, old-fashioned personality, but it can also be understood as another act of estrangement deployed to indicate that the series takes place in a world similar to but significantly different from our own: an alternative earth where the group really is called The – or “The” - Nine Inch Nails. In one sense, all fictional worlds, no matter how realistic, are alternative earths, populated as they are with characters who either do not exist in the real world or are invented versions of real people, as in the case of historical fiction. Realist and historical fiction depend upon a fidelity to actual events for their efficacy; to an extent this is also true of alternative history fiction – which creates alternative earths – but this sub-genre also requires a point of divergence in order to ask ‘what if?’ questions, as in, for example, Philip K. Dick's imagined consequences of an Axis victory in World War II in his novel *The Man in the High Castle* (1962; adapted as a TV series by Amazon in 2015).

Twin Peaks never presents a point of divergence comparable to *The Man In the High Castle*; however, the scenes in episode 8 set in 1945 and 1956 provide a historical context previously absent from the series. The nuclear bomb test at the Trinity Site, New Mexico, in 1945 is clearly of

fundamental importance to the narrative as it results in the entrance of both BOB and the soul of Laura Palmer to the earthly plane through a kind of dimensional tear created by the blast. The 1956 scene, also set in New Mexico, shows other supernatural entities at work, implicitly as a result of the Trinity test. We might argue then that the alternative earth in which *Twin Peaks* is set diverges from our own with the supernatural incursion created by the Trinity explosion. As in our world, the test resulted not only in the allied victory in World War II but subsequently the rise, beginning in the fifties, of American consumerist-driven popular culture, which came to dominate first the West, then the globe. In actual history, fifties styles went out of fashion, but, as we have seen, this does not seem to be the case in the world of the series. Indeed, in the world of the series retro elements seem less exercises in nostalgia than signifiers of the milieu of an alternative earth. Lynch deploys similar signifiers in *Blue Velvet* to expose the corrupt truth beneath the pristine surface of white, suburban America; similarly their use in *Twin Peaks* presents the viewer with a seemingly perfect environment which is revealed to be a charade. Both series and film evoke the myth of fifties American prosperity and its enduring appeal – particularly in American politics - as a simpler, better time before the perceived cultural degradation caused by the rise of the ‘permissive society’ in the sixties.

Although set in the early sixties, the look and feel of the America of the TV adaptation of *The Man in the High Castle* draws on a fifties aesthetic in its costume design and art direction. In episode 3 of the series' second season, we learn that, in the suburbs of Nazi occupied New York, nobody locks their doors because there is no crime. Of course, such seeming security is a by-product of totalitarianism; similarly, the implication in *The Return* that America's post-war prosperity was the result of its nuclear sovereignty, which, as we see in episode 8, tore the fabric of reality and allowed BOB to enter the earthly plane in 1945. Although the tests did also occur in the actual world, this incursion can be taken as the point of divergence from actual world history, and the fifties aesthetic of the world of *Twin Peaks* can be interpreted as a sign that the prosperity which resulted from America's nuclear programme is inextricably linked to the incursion of evil resulting

from the Trinity test. That a sense of the fifties is present in both the original series and in *The Return* shows how this evil is a fundamental part of American culture. The use of fifties style in both *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* is an example of what Viktor Shklovsky called *ostranenie*, which translates from Russian as “defamiliarization” or “estrangement”. In the essay ‘Art as Device’ (1925), Shklovsky writes:

The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By “estranging” objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious”. The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest.¹⁶

Attaching the definite article to Nine Inch Nails's name is also an act of estrangement which, like the enduring fifties aesthetic, is a way of reminding the audience that this is not the world with which they are familiar, however similar it may appear. The use of quotation marks seems to be an ironic act, acknowledging that this is not the ‘real’ Nine Inch Nails and also suggesting that it is only the version for this particular timeline. As such, their presence anticipates the ‘rewriting’ of the series timeline which occurs in episode 17 when Cooper travels in time to prevent Laura Palmer's murder. Similar moments of foreshadowing occur in the various ‘glitches’ which occur in *The Return* such as the major continuity ‘error’ in the Double R scene in episode 7 (which suggests the existence of another, parallel earth); Big Ed's out-of-sync- reflection in episode 13; and the ‘shudder’ in episode 15's assassination scene.

This might seem like the over-interpretation of what may just be simple jokes or mistakes, were it not for the use of a parallel or alternative earth trope when Cooper and Diane cross over (in a fifties style car) to another world in the final episode of *The Return*. This earth is more like our own, with no obvious fifties elements present. Compare for example Judy's Diner in Odessa, Texas, with the Double R in *Twin Peaks*: where the latter is warm, inviting and lively, Judy's appears drab, impersonal and on the point of closure (it is all but empty with chairs already on several tables even though it is open), which we can take as a reference to the decline in the American economy since

2008. What small clientele there is includes three thuggish cowboys who molest the waitress, unthinkable behaviour at the Double R. Furthermore, these cowboys are revealed to be armed, perhaps as a comment on the increase in gun ownership, and crime, in America in the 21st century.

The version of Cooper we see in this world is in some ways also more realistic, being, in the words of Christopher Knowles, “a much more authentic rendering of a middle-aged FBI agent: severe, laconic, brutally efficient at physical violence”¹⁷ as is shown in the aforementioned diner scene in which Cooper single-handedly bests the three cowboys without breaking a sweat or even leaving his seat. This version of Cooper is a synthesis of Dale and Mr C, his BOB-possessed doppelgänger. Referred to by some fans online as ‘Grey Coop’ and named as Richard in the episode, the Cooper of this earth is nevertheless still, as Knowles observes, “on a quest to right a wrong done when he was young”ⁱⁱⁱ: the murder of Laura Palmer. So, we can see that the act of estrangement here is to make both this alternative earth and its Cooper more realistic, in contrast to the quirky milieu and clean cut hero we are used to. This is a Cooper for 2017 and his presence undermines any comforting nostalgia *The Return* might provide.

Another act who performs at the Bang Bang Bar, so far un-discussed, is James Hurley (as played by James Marshall) who, in episode 13 sings ‘Just You’, co-written by Lynch and Badalamenti and first heard in Season 2 of the original series. Unlike the other acts James has no actual world counterpart; even “The” Nine Inch Nails have a real world equivalent, the slight difference in name notwithstanding. Or that is, he has no counterpart unless we consider James Marshall as fulfilling that role. In that case, we might say that Nine Inch Nails also play the role of “The” Nine Inch Nails; certainly, the band members are credited as such in episode 8, as is the case with all the other bands. Eddie Vedder, as we have seen, is credited as playing a character with Vedder's birth name, while Sharon Van Etten is billed as Sharon Van Etten. Rebekah Del Rio, however, is credited as playing “Herself” while Moby, a well-known recording artist and DJ, who is in her band at the Bang Bang Bar is credited as playing “Musician”. Is there any significance to this inconsistency in credits?

Perhaps so. Lubomir Dolezel argues that “actual-world (historical) individuals are able to enter a fictional world only if they become possible counterparts, shaped in any way the fiction maker chooses”¹⁸. When celebrities play themselves in entertainment industry based TV series such as *The Larry Sanders Show* (1992-1998), *Extras* (2005-2007) or *Entourage* (2004-2011) they are fictionalised, transformed into characters often with certain aspects of their personality exaggerated or inverted. We do not get any insight into the personalities of the acts from the Bang Bang Bar except James, but a comparison of their performances there and in the actual-world, via footage on YouTube, shows no significant differences. Sharon Van Etten, then, plays a character called Sharon Van Etten who shares time and space with James Hurley (just as the actual world Van Etten shares time and space with James Marshall); Del Rio plays “Herself” but it is a version of this self which has been fictionalised. Moby plays a “Musician” who looks very like the Moby we know and could very well be this world's version of him (who has perhaps failed to achieve the success of the actual world Moby). The inconsistency in the credits seems, like the definite article and its quotation marks attributed to Nine Inch Nails, another act of estrangement; a puzzling irritant which disrupts the smooth consumption of *The Return* as a comforting piece of nineties nostalgia.

“I’ll point you to a better time/A safer place to be” sing Au Revoir Simone in episode 4. Nostalgia undoubtedly accounts for part of the appeal of *The Return* to certain elements of its audience; however, Lynch and Frost do not pander to this desire. Instead, *The Return* interrogates the form of the TV series ‘revival’, just as the original series subverted the generic conventions of the soap opera. The audience's return to *Twin Peaks*, and to Twin Peaks, is problematised through acts of estrangement which, in addition to the ‘glitches’ mentioned above, include sub-plots which go unresolved (what happened to Audrey Horne?); characters who are introduced but never developed; and seemingly ‘pointless’ scenes such as the two and a half minute shot of a bar worker sweeping the floor of the Bang Bang Bar in episode 7 are included in the episodes. Episode 8, in which “The” Nine Inch Nails perform, is undoubtedly one of the most challenging pieces of television ever broadcast: if it points to a better time hopefully it is to one where such an innovative

use of the medium is more widespread. We are told constantly today that we are in a 'Golden Age' of television but, in many ways, this is a safe place to be with 'quality' series such as the aforementioned *True Detective* or *Tin Star* (2017-) as offering undeniably well-produced but ultimately rather conventional fare "buffed up" with a Lynchian patina. The final episode of *The Return* jettisons all traces of the fifties aesthetic typical of Lynch for a stark realism which is, in this context, also an act of estrangement, pulling the audience out of the dream of *Twin Peaks* and into a more familiar(ised) chronotope. We do not hear what Laura whispers to Cooper at the end of the episode, disturbing him so, but it might be summarised by the title of Thomas Wolfe's great novel (1940) of nostalgia and its dangers: "You can't go home again"?

Which seems to be what *The Return* was telling its audience all along.

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⁶ Reynolds, , *Retromania*, p.307.

⁷ Guan, Frank, 2017, 'Where David Lynch and Lana Del Rey Meet'. *The Vulture* [online], 25/7/17, accessed 20/12/2017.

⁸ Archives are available here: <https://archive.org/details/eastvillageradio>

⁹ Reynolds, *Retromania*, p.179.

ⁱ See Home, Stewart, *What Is Situationism? A Reader*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996, pp.156-157.

¹⁰ Fisher, M., 2009, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books, p.16.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p.6.

¹³ Ibid., p.11.

ⁱⁱ Sweeney, David, "'Your Face Looks Backwards: Time Travel Cinema and the End of History' in *Thesis 11* Vol.131 1. pp.44-53. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

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